

Judges

1. Introduction to Judges

1) Title

- a. This book is named after the main characters of the book (2:16–19). The OT has other references to this period (Ruth 1:1; 2 Sam 7:11; 2 Kings 23:22; 1 Chron 17:10).
- b. A judge was not like our “judges,” making decisions between parties. Rather, they **delivered** Israel from her enemies. They were not **kings** but were military, civil, and spiritual **leaders**.
- c. God raised them up for this role, specially equipping (“**anointing**”) each one to fulfill this responsibility.

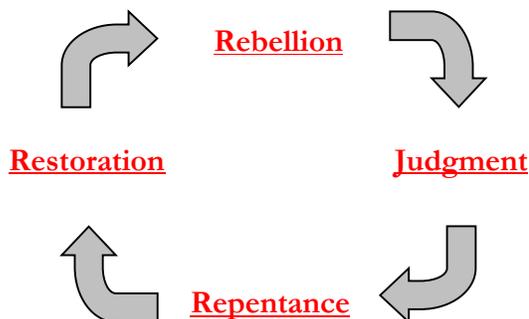
This “anointing” also rested on Moses (Num 11:17, 25), Joshua (Deut 34:9), Saul (1 Sam 10:6), and David (1 Sam 16:13). Theologians call this the **theocratic anointing**, special enablement from God for leading Israel, the kingdom of God on earth mediated through human rulers that God chose and equipped. The theocratic anointing was **not** the same as salvation, and God could remove it as He chose (cf. 1 Sam 16:13–14; Ps 51:11)

- d. They served in different **areas** of Israel, not over all twelve tribes at the same time. This means that judges sometimes served at the same time as other judges in different areas. See the next page for a map of where they served.
- e. The book mentions **12** judges.

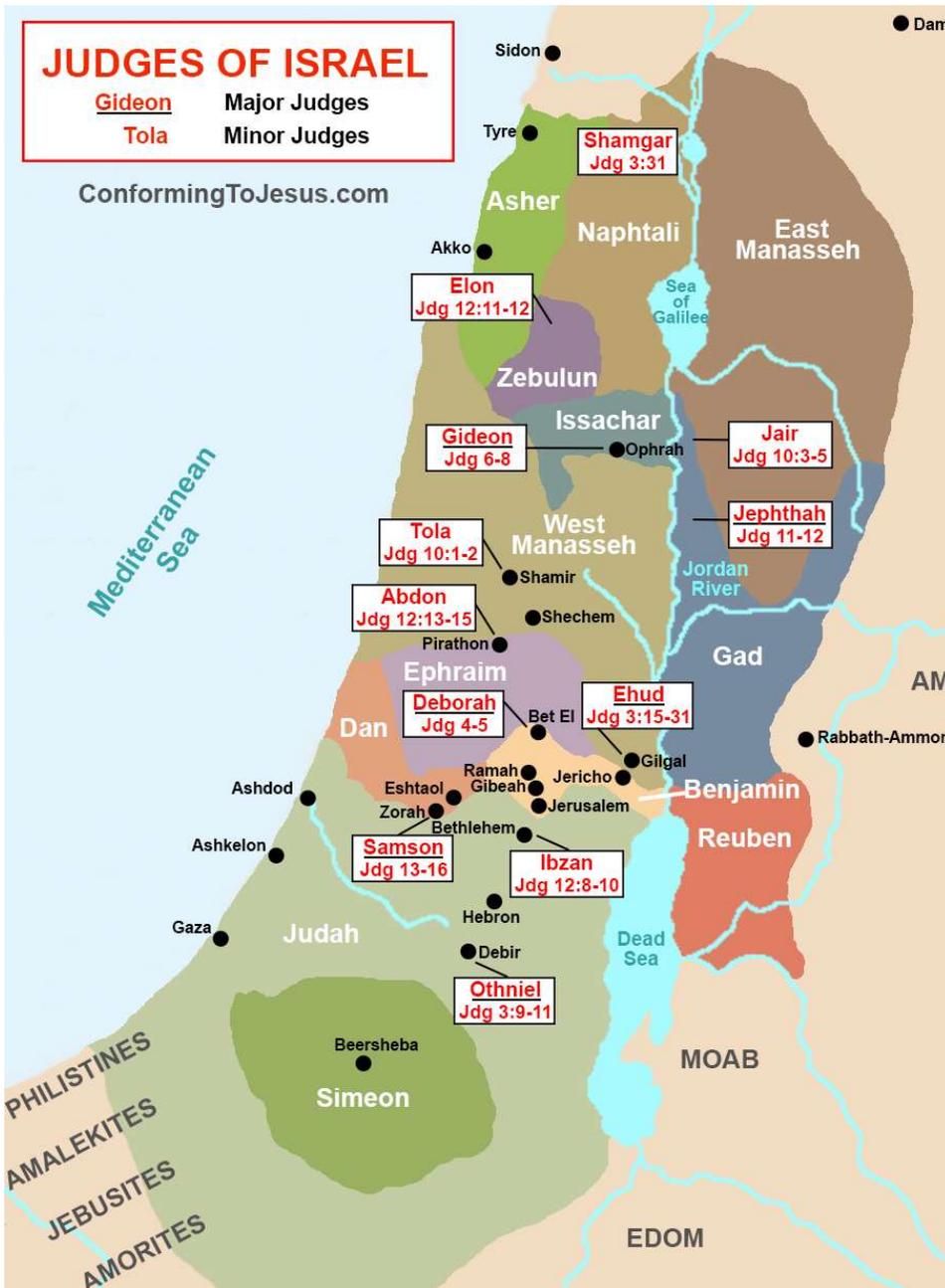
2) Purpose and Theme

a. Purpose

- (1) Judges tells of Israel’s religious and military struggles from the **death** of Joshua to the **dawn** of the monarchy (about **350** years). The entire period of the Judges includes the Books of Judges and Ruth and 1 Samuel chapters 1–12.
- (2) Judges tells of Israel’s **unfaithfulness** to their covenant with God. The cycle is described in 2:11–23 and can be shown like this:



Each cycle that Israel experienced took them further downward away from God.



(3) Judges demonstrates man's moral **depravity** by showing what happens when "every man does what is right in his own eyes (21:25)

(4) Judges provides a record of God's covenant **faithfulness** to his people. Although the people sinned, God did not utterly destroy them.

(5) Judges shows the need of Israel for a **righteous** king who would govern them according to the Mosaic Law so that they did what was right in the Lord's eyes, not their own. A God-appointed and directed king would lead them in true worship and living. See Judg 17:6; 18:1; 19:1; 21:25

b. Themes

(1) Failure through compromise. Disobedience brings defeat. This is in contrast to the book of Joshua, where obedience brings blessing and victory.

"Israel failed because it did what was right in its own eyes, rather than what was right in God's eyes" (David Howard, *Introduction to the OT Historical Books*, p. 102).

(2) Despite Israel's continued downward spiral away from God, He remained **faithful** to His **covenant** with Israel.

(3) Key verses are 17:6 and 21:25

3) Content and Message

- a. Judges tells of the nature and characteristics of spiritual **apostasy** in Israel. *That* was the reason for Israel's trouble, not economic, agricultural, material, military, or some other cause.
- b. Moral and spiritual **relativism** led to **anarchy** (lawlessness; 17:6; 21:25). Judges covers a period from about 1380 B.C. to 1050 B.C.
- c. Setting
 - (1) Under Joshua's leadership Israel **broke** the **back** of Canaanite opposition and parceled out the Promised Land according to the various tribes
 - (2) The tribes were responsible for **conquering** the remaining Canaanite cities. Some reasons why the Canaanites remained—
 - (a) A means by which God **punished** Israel, 2:3
 - (b) God used them to teach a new generation **war**, 3:2
 - (c) Through them God **tested** Israel, 3:4
 - (3) Because Israel failed to destroy the Canaanites, Israel fell into a **downward spiral** of apostasy as a result of their **idolatry** (2:13, 18) and **inter-marriage** (3:5–6) with Canaanites.
- d. One may wonder how God could use weak and sinful men such as Gideon (idolatry, 8:27), Jephthah (murder, 11:39), and Samson (immorality, 16:1).
 - (1) Remember these were **men of their age**, a time of spiritual and moral bankruptcy.
 - (2) God can use a man despite his **character** (remember **Balaam**?)
- e. Chapters 17–21
 - (1) The time period covered in these chapters occurred sometime during the judges described in this book. These chapters relate two circumstances that describe how bad and dark the times were during this period of Israel's history.
 - (2) Chapters 17–21 relate how the true **priesthood** was debased by being combined with idolatry and selfish motivations. It also tells how innocent people were slaughtered from the same motivations (18:27–29).
 - (3) Chapters 19–25 relate an instance that demonstrates **moral** perversion present in Israel (homosexuality, promiscuity, and murder).

f. Canaanite Religion

We'll take a moment to consider this as it sadly runs through the rest of the OT.

(1) The Temptations Involved

- (a) **Food** – Every culture needs food, and most depended on farming to meet this need. The gods of Canaanite religion were thought to control the various aspects of agriculture.
- (b) **Immorality** – An essential aspect of the practice of Canaanite religion was immorality, which is always a great temptation to sinful human beings.
- (c) **Materialism** – The Canaanites were superior in every way to the Israelites, and so Israel foolishly left the Lord by going after Canaanite gods.

(2) The Gods of the Canaanites

- (a) El – The father of the gods and men.
- (b) Asherah – Goddess of the sea, she was the mother of the gods. “Asherah poles,” “wooden images,” “groves” (Deut 7:5; Judg 6:25; 2 Kings 23:6) were carved in her image and were objects of worship.
- (c) **Baal** – The most powerful of the Canaanite gods, Baal was the god who enabled women to conceive and brought rain making the land fertile. Worship of Baal involved gross immorality and child sacrifice (Jer 19:5).
- (d) Ashtoreth – Female goddess of love, war, and fertility. She was Baal’s companion. Worship of her involved homosexuality (1 Kings 14:24).

☞ *Israel’s moral and spiritual failures showed they needed a godly king.*

2. Outline

Basic Outline

- 1) Israel's **Failure**, 1:1–2:5
- 2) Israel's **Deliverers**, 2:6–16:31
- 3) Israel's **Depravity**, 17–21

More Detailed Outline

- 1) Israel's Failures Leading to the Time of the Judges, 1:1–2:5
 - a. Incomplete Conquests, 1:1–36
 - (1) Southern conquests, 1:1–21
 - (2) Conquest of Bethel, 1:22–26
 - (3) Unconquered territories, 1:27–36
 - b. Broken Covenant, 2:1–5
- 2) The History of the Judges, 2:6–16:31
 - a. Introduction to the Time of the Judges, 2:6
 - (1) Passing of godly leaders, 2:6–9
 - (2) The pattern of the time of the judges, 2:10–23
 - (3) The people that tested Israel, 3:1–6
 - b. The Judges, 3:7–16:31
 - (1) Othniel, 3:7–11
 - (2) Ehud, 3:12–30
 - (3) Shamgar, 3:31
 - (4) Deborah and Barak, 4:1–5:31
 - (5) Gideon, 6:1–8:35
 - (6) Ahimelech, 9:1–57
 - (7) Tola, 10:1–2
 - (8) Jair, 10:3–5
 - (9) Jephthah, 10:6–12:7
 - (10) Ibzan, 12:8–10
 - (11) Elon, 12:11–12
 - (12) Abdon, 12:13–15
 - (13) Samson, 13:1–16:31
 - (a) Samson's Birth, 13
 - (b) Samson's Marriage, 14
 - (c) Samson's Deeds, 15
 - (d) Samson's Fall, 16
- 3) Two Terrible Events During the Time of the Judges, 17:1–21:25
 - a. Micah and the Danites, 17–18
 - b. War with Benjamin, 19–21